

Trustee Board Meeting Amos Room, Guild of Students

Present

Robert Smeath, External Trustee **(RS)** (Chair)
 Mikey Brown, President **(President)** (Vice-chair)
 Danielle Murinas, Postgraduate Officer **(PGO)** (Left at 20:05)
 Jules Singh, Education Officer **(EO)**
 Josephine Conway, Activities and Employability Officer **(AEO)**
 Aaliyah Simms, Welfare and Community Officer **(WCO)** (Left at 20:05)
 Wei-Lun Chen, International Officer **(IO)**
 George Christian, Sports Officer **(SO)**
 Tom Goodman, Student Trustee (Postgraduate) **(TG)** (Left at 19:55)
 Johnny Davis, External Trustee **(JD)**
 Wyn Williams, External Trustee **(WW)**
 Emma Wedge, External Trustee **(EW)**
 Henrietta Brealey, External Trustee **(HB)**
 Sarah Aray, International Student Trustee **(SA)**
 Serabi Opiyo, BAME Student Trustee **(SEO)**
 Jake Poulton, Undergraduate Student Trustee **(JP)**

In attendance

Jo Thomas, Chief Executive **(JT)**
 Linzi Sandbrook, Communications & Marketing Manager **(LS)** (agenda items 5 & 7 only)
 Lucy Gill, Student Voice & Representation Manager **(LG)** (agenda items 5 & 7 only)
 Sam Jones, Executive Assistant **(SJ)** (note taker)

Apologies

Erica Conway, University Representative Trustee **(EC)**
 Ian Pain, External Trustee **(IP)**

No	ITEM FOR DISCUSSION	NOTES	ACTION
1	Minutes of Previous Meeting (12.07.21)	The Chair presented the Trustee Board minutes, dated 12 th July 2021 for the Board's approval. The Board approved the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting.	Noted Approved
2	Matters Arising	The Chair noted that all previous actions had been completed.	Noted
3	Officer Action Plans	The Officer Team presented their Action Plans for the Board's information. The Chair noted that the WCO's action plan was not included and would be presented at the next Board meeting.	Noted

		<p>The President noted four main themes in their action plan. The President noted their focus on housing, looking to establish a renters union in Birmingham supported, by the Guild. The President noted their commitment on activism and to support student campaigners. The President noted their plans for mental health support both through the University and Guild and plans to improve accountability for the Guild and Officer team. The President noted their plans to continue to lobby the University on the Guild's sustainability goals including the Fossil Free campaign, which they planned to discuss shortly with the incoming Vice-Chancellor.</p> <p>JD noted possibilities for the Trustee Board to support their work on Officer and Guild accountability.</p> <p>JD asked about the President's plans for a Guild renters union. The President noted plans for a tenant's network through the Guild, without the need for a separate legal entity. JD asked about the communications challenges with naming and shaming landlords. The President noted their preference to highlight positive landlord conduct in the local sector as well as bringing attention to bad practice.</p> <p>The AEO noted their plans for an expanded events programme as COVID-19 restrictions eased, including a 7 night 'fab-athon' club night series, paperless ticketing for Guild events and the use biodegradable plastic cups. The AEO noted plans for a comprehensive support package for societies as they returned to in-person activities, and the need for more in-depth research into barriers to society membership.</p> <p>TG noted the 7 day 'fab-athon', and the importance of making sure the Guild was not encouraging problematic alcohol consumption. The AEO noted planning for non-alcohol events during the event programme. RS suggested focusing the theme of the evenings towards different groups of students. JP asked about activities catered at students who did not drink. The AEO noted a possible quiz night or other non-club night events during the week. SA noted the benefit to the Guild's finances of back-to-back club nights, but possible increased risk of COVID transmission. The AEO noted the Guild's plans to implement COVID-19 vaccine passport requirements for entry to club nights, as outlined by the government.</p> <p>TG asked about the roll out of the campus vaccine hub. JT noted that the Guild was continuing to work with the University on promoting opportunities for students to get vaccinated, but a significant amount of uncertainty remained around the implementation of the COVID passport requirements.</p> <p>The EO noted ongoing work to increase promotion of the Student Rep System (SRS) and the Guild's revised democratic committee structure. The EO noted work with the University on improving course information communications to students, particularly for timetabling which was frequently poor. The EO noted plans to lobby for reform of the University's extenuating circumstances processes to make securing extensions for deadlines simpler and quicker, and more consistent across University colleges. The EO noted plans to review the University's</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p>
--	--	--	---

		<p>accessibility programme for disabled students and lobby the University to expand the student hardship fund.</p> <p>JD asked about the motivation for the work on increasing Guild transparency. The President noted difficulties for adequate scrutiny of the officer team during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Board discussed student perceptions of the Guild. The EO noted that in-person activities gave the Guild a good opportunity to improve student engagement and outreach over the year and speak to students face to face again.</p> <p>RS asked about elements of the Guild and University's work during the COVID-19 pandemic which could be retained as restrictions eased. The EO noted the benefit to continued blended service models, including online materials and events for students unable to attend Edgbaston campus. The IO noted the need for course content to continue to be accessible online. JT noted the Guild's ambitions for more services to be accessible online.</p> <p>RS noted the opportunity for the University to expand its 'digital first' model for students as COVID restrictions eased.</p> <p>EW noted the Guild's significant financial pressures and the need to keep the Guild's plans and ambitions within the realistic funding model, which would require additional investment from the University. RS noted the importance of clearly stating the resources required for the Guild to provide its ambitions of service provision to the University, and reset working relationships during year '0'.</p> <p>HB noted the need for a continued focus on income generation and the Guild's financial position as the strategic plans were reviewed. The President noted the need for creative solutions to grow the Guild's income streams into the future, including an expanded and innovative commercial offering. The PGO noted the possible future value of PG students as a key commercial audience for the Guild moving forwards, which was not the case currently. RS noted the importance of international and PG students in terms of commercial operations.</p> <p>WW noted the Guild's resilience during the COVID pandemic, which served as a strong foundation for future investment from the University.</p> <p>The IO noted their plans for improving international student engagement in the Guild and increasing awareness of the Guild services and events. The IO noted plans for a campaign beginning in October to develop a new stream of student leaders from the international student community. The IO noted plans to revitalise the Global Buddies programme of events as COVID-19 restrictions eased, and grow international student representation at the Guild. The IO noted ongoing work to revitalise the Guild's international student webpages. The IO noted plans to continue lobbying the University on improving visa support services and travel support while travel restrictions remained in place.</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p>
--	--	--	---

		<p>SA noted the University’s approach of separating International and Home students in student consultation, which was unhelpful.</p> <p>The PGO noted plans to work with the University to review wellbeing services for PG students, seek the removal of age limits on some University services which affected older PG students, and to improve University and Guild PG student communications. The PGO noted ongoing work to bring disparate employability support for PG’s together in one place, and better inform postgraduate students about the state of the job market. The PGO noted plans to improve coordination between the University and Guild on communications, and develop improved models for research sharing. The PGO noted plans to revitalise the Guild’s PG community and jointly brand events together with the graduate school.</p> <p>TG noted the significant opportunities for accessing project funding through the graduate school. TG noted the importance of reviewing PGR student communications overall, where currently PGR students received some communications as students, some as staff. The PGO noted ongoing work with BUCU to understand the status of PGR students in terms of contracts.</p> <p>TG asked about mechanisms for increasing engagement from PG students. The PGO noted plans for ‘neutral’ branding of events, rather than focusing on UG or PG students specifically.</p> <p>The SO noted the significant disruption for sports teams over the last 18 months, with the majority of sports teams prevented from holding matches and training during period of lockdown. The SO noted ongoing work to support sports teams to build back from COVID-19 and improve communications from UB sport to teams. The SO noted plans to improve UB Sport’s balance between different sports teams in terms of resource. The SO noted plans to revitalise sports welfare officers’ role and clarify that committee position, noting the importance of the whole of sports committees taking responsibility for wellbeing and inclusivity. The SO noted the University’s opportunity to champion para-sports in the run up to the Birmingham Commonwealth Games, and work with the University on supporting students with invisible disabilities to get involved in sport. The SO noted the importance of reviewing UB Sport grant allocations to sports teams, with which teams were currently very dissatisfied. The SO noted the importance of sports teams being able to roll over their annual funding to save up for new equipment and sunk costs.</p> <p>HB noted the significant opportunity of the Birmingham Commonwealth Games. The SO noted the involvement of several Guild officers in the planning for the games, noting their plans to support teams to take a key role with the games.</p> <p>The Board noted the Officer Action Plans.</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p>
4	CEO Report	JT presented the CEO Report for the Board’s Information.	Noted

		<p>JT noted the importance of the Guild's new strategic plan to be flexible in light of financial and workload pressures within the organisation, and the need to review the strategic plan at regular points during the year.</p> <p>The Board discussed the Guild's strategic focus. JT noted the current focus of the Guild's management team on reopening of the Guild's commercial offering. JT noted continual requests for support to the Guild from the University on elements of the student experience, such as Open days which was stretching Guild resources and would necessitate increased funding provision.</p> <p>JT noted that the Guild had been successful in its claim for VAT to HMRC on the historical catering charge. JT noted ongoing work on HMRC's claim on tax handling in the former service-level agreement schemes.</p> <p>JT updated the Board on the Guild's current end-of-year financial position, now expected to be a better than break even position. JT noted several ongoing discussions with HMRC in relation to the handling of VAT moving forwards from which the budget could change, however overall, the Guild's finances appeared positive.</p> <p>JT noted plans to create a small strategic fund to support new innovative projects. JD noted the hard work of the Guild team to achieve a better than break even position in light of very challenging circumstances.</p> <p>The EO noted a significant over recruitment of UG students by the University, which would increase demands on the Guild's service provision. The Board discussed the state of the current HE recruitment.</p> <p>The Board noted the CEO Report.</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p>
5	Impact Report 2020-21	<p>LS and LG joined the meeting at 19:10.</p> <p>LS delivered a presentation outlining the Guild's Impact report for the 2020-2021 academic year.</p> <p>LS noted significant disruptions to the Guild's operations over the last 12 months due to subsequent national lockdowns, however despite these difficulties Guild departments had delivered a range of support services and opportunities for students and demonstrated resilience.</p> <p>LS updated the Board on the Guild 2020-21 strategic priorities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Engagement & Participation 2. Communication 3. Academic & Learning Experience 4. Representing the Student Voice 5. Mental Health & Financial Assistance <p>LS noted significant engagement of students dispute COVID-19 activities, noting over 9,500 students recruited to student groups, more than 300 Guild affiliated groups, and the 'save a society' campaign. LS noted the online student community formed around the Guild during the national</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p>

		<p>lockdown, from which a deeper engagement with students had developed.</p> <p>LS noted the Guild’s work on communications, with the Guild’s elections results night held online with over 15,000 viewers, expanding onto the ‘Tik Tok’ social network, holding virtual welcome and refreshers fairs online with over 7,000 attendees.</p> <p>LS noted the Guild’s work on student’s academic experience, noting over 1,300 student reps supported by the Guild and high levels of satisfaction with the Guild advice service. LS noted the positive work of the ‘Outstanding Teaching Awards’ programme, which had received more than 400 nominations of teaching best practice across the University. LS noted the work of the EO and Student Voice team on the Guild’s Access and Participation Plan (APP) submission to the Office for Students.</p> <p>LS noted the Guild’s work on representing the Student Voice, delivering the one of the highest SU election turnouts in the UK in 2021 and lobbying the University on declaring a climate emergency. LS noted the delivery of the Guild’s newly constituted democratic committee structure from 2021 onwards, with three All Student Meetings held in 2021/22.</p> <p>LS noted the Guild’s work on supporting student mental health and financial wellbeing, including more than 14,000 wellbeing calls to student affected by COVID-19, many required to self-isolate in their accommodation. LS noted the Guild’s roll-out of funding from the COVID Response fund for students in urgent financial difficulties, and the ‘Match-Up, Catch-Up’ event series to help students form new friendships while living and working remotely. LS noted the range of Hall Reps events provided to students in accommodation both in-person and online as restrictions allowed.</p> <p>LS noted the Guild’s success in the Time 100 Best companies award, achieving high rankings in both national and local metrics. LS noted the Guild’s continued status as an accredited disability confident employer and Green Impact ‘Excellent’ rated Students’ Union.</p> <p>LS noted the Guild flexibility in responding to the pandemic, with all staff meetings and social events held online, a weekly staff newsletter sent out, and digital personalised Christmas cards sent out to all students.</p> <p>HB noted the hard work and reliance of the Guild staff team in achieving significant impacts over the last 12 months. RS noted the value of sharing the information with the University directly to highlight the impact of the Guild. The PGO noted the importance of noting the Guild’s ambition to continually improve service provision in future communications to the University.</p> <p>LS presented a video montage of the Guild’s work over the last academic year.</p> <p>The Board noted the Impact Report 2020-2021 presentation.</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p>
--	--	--	---

		LS left the meeting at 19:30.	Noted
6	Strategy 2021/22 & KPI's Update	<p><i>(Note: Item 6 discussed after Item 7 (items 6 & 7 switched), therefore item 6 was discussed without LG and LS present).</i></p> <p>JT presented the Strategy 2021/22 & KPI's Update for the Board's information.</p> <p>JT noted ongoing work to develop the Guild strategic plan within the existing resource envelope and in line with the agreed one year budget. JT provided context to the Board on the Guild's draft 5 year plan presented to the University, which had been paused at the University's request while two ongoing reviews were completed. JT noted the Guild's current work on planning for year '0' (2021-22). JT updated the Board on the Guild's long-planned IT transition to the University's systems, which was progressing and awaiting final approval with the University.</p> <p>JT noted current high workloads within the organisation, and ongoing discussions with the Guild's management team to understand elements of work to pause or stop if required.</p> <p>JD noted points in the Officers action plans on authentic in-person communications. JD noted the need for the Guild to support the Officer team directly in the engage students at events and on campus. The President noted current limited resource in the Guild's communications support, which required a shift to Officer-led communications.</p> <p>The Board discussed the Guild's communications approach. EW noted the complexity of balancing between projecting an authentic voice and retaining a professional communication presence as a trusted source of information for students. RS noted the importance of focusing on strategic communications in the Guild's priorities for the year ahead.</p> <p>RS suggested discussing the Guild's strategic plan in more detail at the next Trustee Board meeting. SJ to include on agenda.</p> <p>The Board approved the Strategy 2021/22 & KPI's Update.</p> <p>The PGO left the meeting at 20:05.</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Approved</p> <p>Noted</p>
7	NSS Report 2021	<p>LG presented the NSS Report 2021 for the Board's information.</p> <p>LG noted the role of the National Student Survey (NSS) in the HE sector and Students' Unions in relation to Question 26, a question on academic representation. LG provided context on the University's previous performance in NSS surveys, and the importance placed upon NSS results by the HE sector. JT provided context on question 26 of the NSS and its relevance to the SU sector in terms of measuring academic representation. JT noted widespread dissatisfaction with the current wording of question 26.</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p>

		<p>LG noted significant declines in the University of Birmingham’s NSS scores compared to Russell Group comparators, particularly on the student voice, learning resources and assessment and feedback.</p>	Noted
		<p>LG noted an overall decline across the sector, however these were less severe than the declines seen in the University’s 2021 NSS scores, in particular for BAME students where satisfaction figures were now significantly lower than the sector average and among the lowest in the Russell Group.</p>	Noted
		<p>LG noted that historically UoB had performed well in scores around social activities and non-academic opportunities, expected to relate to the Guild’s wide offer of social and society opportunities, however this had also declined somewhat in 2021, believed to be due to COVID-19 lockdowns and the inability of society events to go ahead in person.</p>	Noted
		<p>LG noted ongoing work within the Guild to formulate a response and outline the Guild’s approach to student communications in light of declining NSS results, however the Guild’s communication resources were limited and NSS targeted ‘turn-around’ content would require sufficient priority.</p>	Noted
		<p>LG noted significant investment moves made by the University since the publication of the NSS scores, including an increase in student facing communications of the Guild’s existing work and the work of the Education Officer. The PGO noted a lack of awareness in the student body that the student rep system was a joint venture between the Guild and University, which may have an impact on question 26. LG noted very positive local relationships with rep scheme staff at the University, however a lack of central University promotion of the student rep scheme (SRS) as a partnership between the Guild and University. The EO noted the possibility for common branding with the Guild’s involvement made clear.</p>	Noted
		<p>The IO noted the value of Canvas training for student reps. LG noted that often University staff often did not require or sufficiently encourage student reps to complete the Guild’s Canvas training programme, and in some cases used local training materials instead.</p>	Noted
		<p>WW noted the negative tone from free-text comments in UoB’s NSS. The President noted significant student dissatisfaction with University communications during the pandemic, particularly in relation to the ‘no detriment’ policy and the University’s approach to COVID-19 and the return of students to campus in September 2020. LG noted long-running negative trends in the University’s NSS scores, in particular with teaching & assessment and University communications, which had declined further the 2021 scores data. The PGO noted confusion in the student body between the work of the University and the Guild, which had affected the Guild’s performance in question 26.</p>	Noted
		<p>JT noted their concerns about the creation of a new team of approximately 20 student ‘academic experience interns’ who have been tasked to promote the student voice, which may lead to an erosion of the</p>	

		<p>role of the Guild Officer team as leaders and representatives of the student body. EW noted the importance of the Guild retaining its own identity and independence in light of declining figures in the University's NSS scores.</p> <p>HB asked about the Guild Engagement with the University. LG noted the Guild's ongoing work to engage with college support staff on the student rep system and academic representation, however difficulties were posed by the relative size of the University's staff provision compared to the Guild's.</p> <p>The Board supported the recommendations in the NSS Report 2021.</p> <p>LG and TG left the meeting at 19:55.</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p>
8	EDI Update	The Board agreed to defer this item to the next meeting. SJ to include on agenda.	SJ
9	Annual Health & Safety Report	<p>JT presented the Annual Health & Safety Report for the Board's information.</p> <p>JT noted the major incident in the Guild building in January 2020 where an attendee at a Guild event was severely injured by falling from a stairwell. JT noted slow progress with the University Estates team on capital work identified during the review as required to bring the staircases up to standard and improve safety. JT noted that the attendees' injuries had been severe however the Guild understood they were continuing to make a good recovery. JT noted that the Guild's insurers had conducted a full review at the time of the incident and were prepared for a possible claim.</p> <p>RS noted the importance of refreshing health and safety training for staff as the Guild transitioned to holding more events in person, in-particular club nights from welcome week onwards.</p> <p>The Board approved the Annual Health & Safety Report.</p> <p>The PGO and WCO left the meeting at 20:05.</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Approved</p> <p>Noted</p>
10	Appointments Panel Report	<p>JT presented the Appointments Panel Report for the Board's information.</p> <p>RS noted that the Guild's HR Committee independent members, Anthony Seeley and Nick Weatherburn would shortly reach the end of their three-year terms on the Guild's HR Committee. The Trustee Board agreed to extend the terms of the HR Committee independent members for another three year term.</p> <p>The Board noted the Appointments Panel Report.</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p>
11	Governance Attendance Reports	JT presented the Governance Attendance Reports for the Board's information.	Noted

		RS noted that attendance across the organisation was positive, however attendance may now change as the Guild transitioned to holding more meetings in person, and figures would need to be kept under review as meetings moved back to in-person activity. The Board noted the Governance Attendance Reports.	Noted Noted
12	AOB (Any Other Business)	No Items noted.	
13	Meeting Reflection	No Items noted.	

The Chair closed the meeting at 20:30.